

YOUTH CRIME IS GROWING AND THE COMMUNITY IS STARTING TO FIGHT BACK



STAFF PHOTOS/JOERD WITTEVEEN

Olga Baranovsky (right), mother of slain teenage Matty Baranovsky chats with her son's high school principal Judy Kennedy at a public forum on teen violence held in Vaughan Monday evening.

Victim's mom offers solution to violence

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

Explaining how people can stop the kind of violence that killed her son, the words of Olga Baranovsky were simple but profound.

"Just to be people. That's all," she said. "It's a very short answer. But that's all."

Baranovsky, the mother of slain Toronto teenager Dmitri "Matty" Baranovsky, spoke Monday night at the City Playhouse in Thornhill at a public forum examining the causes of teen violence and the measures people can take to curb it.

Dmitri died last November after a group of youths beat him in a north Toronto park. His mother was the special guest at the forum, called Save our Children.

Many of the nearly 300 people at the forum spoke of the brutal assault on Newmarket teenager Jonathan Wamback, who recently emerged from a three-month coma.

After the two-hour event, Baranovsky and her husband Elliott Korczak said they agreed with the Wamback family's call to change the Young Offenders Act to make violent youth more responsible for their actions.

Community policing helps combat teen violence, but for Korczak, the answer to the problem lies in every person.

More police isn't going to solve

Just be people. That's all.

Olga Baranovsky
Son Matty killed in gang beating

the problem. It's just a stop-gap measure," he said. "We need to think about the things we can do individually to make things better. Everybody's got to get involved."

New York psychologist Norman Blumenthal echoed a similar sentiment during the forum, urging parents to take a genuine, but not overbearing, interest in their children's lives.

"Let this be a springboard," he said. "Treat the cessation of life with the affirmation of life. That's what you are doing here tonight."

"A teen tends to create extended 'mini-families' of friends when his or her parents are not part of the picture," Blumenthal said. "But the danger is the friends don't usually place controls on the activities of the family."

Norm Gardner, chairperson of the Toronto Police Services Board, said the rate of youth crime more than doubled between 1987 and 1997. Youths between the ages of 12 and 17 accounted for nearly one-quarter of all charges laid in the last year, for which figures are available from Statistics Canada, he added.

"Youth crime is growing," he said. "And Toronto is not much dif-

ferent than York Region."

Gardner blamed the stats on a complex network of societal interests, including military officials who promote a kill-or-be-killed mentality and media outlets, which feed fears by playing up violence in crime stories.

He said the Young Offenders Act is "absurd" and gives thugs unparalleled freedom to commit crimes and suffer relatively few penalties.

One of its more contentious clauses allows officials to transfer the cases of people as old as 17 years to youth court.

Gardner has been lobbying federal ministers to amend the legislation so youth aged 15 and older are tried as adults.

The federal government is reviewing the act, but for those who have seen what York Regional Police Const. Mark Altermann has seen, changes may not come soon enough.

The officer has been visiting local schools for about two years and has investigated everything from assaults to shootings.

"It's a big problem," he said, suggesting the community can help curb youth violence by mentoring children or teaching them skills in organized workshops.

"Take that hour that you spend sitting and watching Seinfeld reruns and get involved in the community," he remarked.

Friends give man chance at life

Man working two jobs to bring fiancée to Canada for March wedding

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN
Staff Writer

A Main Street, Markham restaurateur is being hailed a hero after saving the life of a friend who collapsed in his cafe Saturday night.

Twenty-six-year-old Ganeshan Elaganeshan, called Mohan by his friends, remains in a coma in Markham Stouffville Hospital's intensive care unit. He's listed in critical condition and doctors are still trying to determine exactly what happened.

Corrado Sortino, owner of Sortino's Cafe, has known Elaganeshan about six years. He was welcoming him to his new restaurant about 8 p.m. Saturday.

"He hadn't been in the door two seconds, I said, 'Just a second, and I wasn't 10 feet away when I heard him fall.' He was having a seizure of some sort so we put a down-filled jacket under his head and did a finger sweep of his mouth. But his breathing became more and more shallow. Then it stopped entirely and we couldn't find a pulse."

Others soon joined in the bid to save Elaganeshan, including Sortino's brother Michael and friends Jeff Rodricks and Mike and Gord Merritt.

They performed CPR until emergency crews arrived and took over.

"They used the defibrillator at least five times and worked on him a good 20 minutes," Sortino said.

"They ended up getting a faint pulse and rushed him to Markham Stouffville. Everybody told us he would have died without the CPR."

Sortino is still reeling from the incident, which happened in front of a dozen patrons.

"Mohan was driving two minutes before that. If he was alone when it happened, he would have died," he said. "It seemed like it was in slow motion. Everyone remained calm, everyone was willing to help."

"The ambulance people called us his angels and said by keeping his brain oxygenated we may have reduced the possibility of brain damage. The emotion in the room when they left — well, it was something."

Elaganeshan, a Scarborough resident, has not regained con-



GANESHAN ELAGANESHAN: Seizure leaves man in coma

sciousness. He's on a ventilator to help him breathe and has had at least three CAT scans. But there was good news yesterday, Sortino said. He's showing movement and opened his eyes at one point.

All his mother knows is her son may be on his death bed.

Sortino has been helping Elaganeshan's brother, Siva, and several cousins, who are keeping vigil at the hospital by bringing over food for them, helping them understand what the doctors and nurses are saying and moving Elaganeshan's car off Main Street.

Elaganeshan is Sri Lankan and was working two jobs, including one at Father's Steak House & Pub in Markham, to bring his fiancée to Canada for their wedding next month.

His mother, Kamalambkai, remains in Sri Lanka and is desperate to get to her son's bedside.

"We will do everything we can to get her here," Sortino vowed, adding he's investigating the possibility of opening a trust fund to help defray airfare expenses for the family.

"All his mother knows is her son may be on his death bed. His bride is waiting to hear what's happening to her future husband. It's very scary. Here's a young, healthy, 26-year-old who was always smiling, always friendly and this happens. When it rains it pours."

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